

Responding To His Presence

Genesis 18:1-8

Dr. Michael Elliott

"Walking by Faith" Series on the Life of Abraham - Lesson 13 of 20

As far as Abraham knew, this was going to be a day like any other day. He had finished his morning chores and sat down in the doorway of his tent to escape the heat of the mid-day sun. Then, something unusual happened ... the Lord appeared to Abraham ... in the flesh! Theologians call this event a "Christophany," which is the name given to a physical manifestation of Christ in the Old Testament.

It is imperative that you notice that Abraham was not doing anything "holy" to warrant such a visitation. This meeting was initiated by the Lord, Himself. Abraham's "face to face" encounter with the Lord models for us how we should respond to the Lord's presence. Realize, the same God who met with Abraham wants to walk and talk with us!

Christ Appeared In Human Form

The Lord's appearance to Abraham was not in a vision or a dream ... it was physical. When you read the text, you will see that Abraham bathed their dusty feet in cool water. He also prepared a meal and watched the Lord eat as he conversed with Him under the shade of the tree. This incident, and other similar incidents in Scripture, has puzzled Bible students for centuries. The question is often asked, "Was this really God in the flesh or a high ranking angel?" I believe that this was a pre-incarnate, physical manifestation of God. The Scriptures often refer to this manifestation as the "Angel of the Lord" and the name of the "Angel of the Lord" is Jesus!

When these three men appeared to Abraham, Abraham bowed in a posture of worship and was not rebuked for doing so. Therefore, this could not have been an angel, as angels never allow anyone to worship them. Angels are very sensitive to the subject of worship as they remember what happened to Lucifer when he sought heaven's worship. We read of their arrival in Genesis 18:2, *So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground.*

Another story you will remember is when Daniel encountered an angel and fell down on his face in terror. However, in this instance, the angel made Daniel stand up before he would continue his conversation with him as we see in Daniel 10:10-11, *Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling.*

On two occasions, the Apostle John tried to worship his angelic messengers while being shown the events of the Revelation ... he was stopped both times. This raises a legitimate question, "What is the difference between this visitation of Jesus in Genesis 18 and His Incarnation (robed in flesh and being born of a virgin)?" When Jesus appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18, he was not coming to live out His life as a man and experience the trials and temptations that are common to man. When Jesus appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18, he came to visit a friend. Jesus came to enjoy Abraham's fellowship.

Abraham's encounter with the Lord is just one of many encounters we find recorded in the Scriptures:

- The Lord walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day;
- The Lord wrestled with Jacob at the River Jabbok;
- The Lord spoke face to face with Moses as one speaks with a friend;
- The Lord met Joshua outside of Jericho and gave him the battle plans to take the city.

God's Desire to Spend Time with Abraham

Remember that this was not Abraham's first encounter with the Lord's manifest presence. Abraham's first encounter is recorded in Genesis 15, when the Lord appeared to him to establish His covenant regarding the land of Canaan. Abraham's second encounter with the Lord is recorded in Genesis 17, when the Lord established a covenant with him regarding his heir, Isaac.

But, this encounter in Genesis 18 is apparently different from the previous encounters. This time, the Lord appears to Abraham for no apparent reason other than to fellowship with a friend. I know that later in this chapter the Lord will speak to Abraham and Sarah about the time line for Isaac's arrival; however, this disclosure was not initially on the Lord's agenda. Time with Abraham was the only apparent thing on the agenda.

I wonder how many times the Lord has sought to approach us for no other reason than to fellowship with us? Most of the time when we bow our hearts in prayer, we all too quickly give God His marching orders for the day. We are busy telling God everything that is wrong and giving Him the proper timeline on which to fix our issues. We even tell Him how we want Him to accomplish what we have demanded. Rarely, if ever, do we fellowship with the Lord without asking Him for something. When was the last time you bowed before Him to ask what He wanted to talk about?

The Lord's appearance to Abraham reminds us of what would later be said to His disciples; *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing* (John 15:5). The issue in this verse is not the production of fruit; rather, it is our need to abide in the Lord's presence. Bearing fruit will always be the result of our abiding with the Lord.

I believe the Lord's visitation to Abraham, coupled with what He told His disciples in John 15:5, gives evidence to the Lord's great desire to walk closely with us. The Lord desires quality time with us for no other reason than to have intimate fellowship with us. We, more often than not, make the grave mistake of treating God as if he were a business partner. We let Him know His primary purpose is to help us reach our goals so we can become comfortable and satisfied in life.

A Proper Response to God's Presence

The first thing that Abraham did was to humble himself before the Lord in worship; *Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground* (Genesis 18:1-2).

The second thing Abraham did was to express the desire of his heart for the fellowship of the Lord. Abraham said in Genesis 18:3, *"My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant."*

There was always an underlying goal behind every visitation of the Lord in Scripture. The Lord's desire was to create a deep desire for His presence within the hearts of those encountering His visitation. This concept is seen clearly after the golden calf incident in the wilderness. God warned Moses that He was considering withdrawing from leading the Israelites. He told Moses He would give the assignment to an angel. Moses cried out in protest to the Lord in Exodus 33:15, *Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here."* The cry of Moses must become our cry as well ...

"Lord, we don't want to do anything without your manifest presence being with us."

"Lord, if you are not doing it with me, it is not worth doing!"

"Lord, if you are not going with me, it is not a place worth going!"

New Testament Encounters with God's Presence

There are encounters with God's presence throughout the New Testament. We read that the Lord responded to those who had a desire for Him. One of the first encounters occurred early one evening when Jesus ordered His disciples to get into their boat and cross the Sea of Galilee. He was going to go to the mountain to pray and then He would meet them on the other side.

While on their journey, a dangerous storm arose and a fear of not surviving gripped the hearts of the disciples. About that time, they saw the Lord walking on the storm-tossed waters and cried out to Him; *Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled* (Mark 6:45-52).

DON'T MISS THE FACT ...

The Lord would have passed by them in the storm had they not cried out to Him.

Another encounter occurred after the Lord's resurrection. Two of his disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were rehearsing their disappointment of watching the crucifixion of Jesus. They were sadly shuffling along the road for they felt they had experienced the death of their hopes and dreams that would free from the tyranny of Rome.

Jesus joined with them on their journey, but their hearts were too clouded with grief to recognize Him. As the day was drawing to a close, the two men sought a place to stay for the night and they asked the Stranger who had walked with them to stay as well. Jesus accepted their offer and they fellowshiped around their evening meal. Jesus then opened their understanding of who He was; *Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him* (Luke 24:13-31).

DON'T MISS THE FACT ...

Jesus would have continued on His journey if they hadn't requested that He spend the night.

God's Desires to Spend Time with Us Today

Revelation 3:20 tells us that the Lord is standing at a door knocking and He is seeking to gain entrance; *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* Artists have rendered beautiful paintings depicting this verse of Scripture. Often this passage is used when seeking to bring someone to a saving knowledge of Christ. The story is told of how the Lord stands at the door of our heart and seeks to gain entrance into our lives.

Notice that Revelation 3:20 doesn't say that He is seeking to transact business with us. He is simply seeking our fellowship. While it is true that the Scriptures teach the ever-present, never-forsaking, abiding presence of the Lord with His people; it is also true that He is looking for a people with whom to fellowship. Just as we deeply desire the Lord's presence to come and minister to us, the same would hold true of His desire towards us.

Salvation is one plausible and broader application of this verse. However, when you read the context surrounding it, the Lord is not standing at the door of an individual heart ... He is standing at the door of His church! We have the audacity to schedule Him out of His own church! He is seeking to regain entrance to His church! Many would question why He doesn't just open the door and walk in? The answer to this question is very simple ... He doesn't force Himself on any of us and He will not violate our will!

We can easily see this problem in our corporate gatherings. We are quick to offer lip service when we say we want the Lord's presence to be manifest among us. However, when the Lord does show up, people tend to get upset if He disrupts their schedule and the service doesn't end on time. People usually don't mind an occasional visitation from the Lord as long as He doesn't stay too long and alter their schedules.

I am convinced we will never really know the Lord in the fullness of His fellowship until our desire for His presence overrules everything in our lives! Remember that the Scriptures teach us that the Lord is our ever-abiding Friend and there is never a moment that He is not with us. Let's become aware of His presence and respond to Him as Abraham did. Let's make it our priority to humble ourselves before Him in worship. Let's love Him for who He is and not just for what He has done for us. Let's express to Him the deep desire of our hearts for the fellowship of His presence. Let's treat Him like the Friend that He is and not as a business partner that helps us get things done!

Have you ever begun your prayer time by asking the Lord what He wanted to talk about?

How many times has the Lord sought you out for fellowship, but you were just too busy?

Can you remember the last time you sought the Lord for nothing more than fellowship?

What does the Lord have to compete with in order to get your undivided attention?

Be honest with yourself ... How deep is your desire for the Lord's presence?

IF YOU WOULD LIKE YOUR FRIENDS TO RECEIVE THIS DEVOTIONAL CONTACT:

Dr. Michael Elliott, Pastor of Regency Christian Center

Director of *Touching Africa* Missions Outreach

P.O. Box 460459 . Aurora, CO 80046

303.680.2363 . www.regencychristian.org